all dirt roads taste of salt

a feature film by Raven Jackson

ALL DIRT ROADS TASTE OF SALT

by

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** This script does not follow a linear structure. Instead, every scene shows Mack, the protagonist, in a different moment of her life, from her youth to her older years. To guide the reading, each scene heading specifies the age of Mack for that particular scene.

“her dangling braids the color of rain.”

- Lucille Clifton

1 EXT. CUMBERLAND RIVER - DAY (**SEVEN-YEAR-OLD MACK**) 1

It's a hot summer in Tennessee.

Reeds bend into water.

Clouds sit dark in the sky, about to spit out rain.

We see MACKENZIE, Black, chickenpox scars scattered on her skin, a fishing pole in her hands. She's better known as "Mack".

TERRY, Black, 40, Mack's father, is teaching her how to fish.

TERRY
Not too quick.

An orange-pink cork bobs on the surface of the water.

Periodically, it goes under.

TERRY
He's trying to rob you, Mack.

We see Mack's hand as she debates whether or not to reel the line in or be still.

TERRY
You'll know when you got it.

The cork disappears underwater, moves away from shore.

TERRY
Now!

Mack reels the line in.

Quick.

We hear the fishing pole spin.

After a beat, the fish's body breaks water.

Mack's hands move faster and faster.

2 EXT. CUMBERLAND RIVER - DAY - LATER (**STILL SEVEN-YEAR-OLD MACK**) 2

The white lips of three catfish, barely breathing.

Their whiskers black as leeches.

They’re in a trap close to shore. Freshly caught.

Mack brings her finger close to one catfish’s mouth, almost touches it - until she does.

The fish moves its mouth open and closed, open and closed, as Mack uses her finger to outline its lips.

She moves her finger to its head, touches its thin skin, watches its dark eye.

But the fish darts back into the shallow water of its cage.

Mack looks at the wet left on her finger.

Rubs it.

Brings it to her nose.

TERRY (O.S.)
You bet not be letting those fish out.

We hear Terry’s footsteps coming as Mack, squatting, stares at the rippling water where the fish just swam.

Terry lifts a heavy rock. A white rope’s beneath it to keep the fish trap in place.

JOSIE, Black, 10, Mack’s sister, stands behind Terry, a stick in her hand. A dark birthmark on her cheek.

She presses the stick into and out of mud, flings it.

Some mud gets on Terry’s foot. He doesn’t notice.

Josie’s thick hair is missing its hair tie.

Terry bends, pulls the fish trap out of water.

The three catfish flop against each other as the summer air hits their skin, opening gills.

TERRY
Go get that line I left by the bridge.

Terry thumps Mack softly on the forehead with his index finger and thumb as he passes.

Mack stands, watches as the fish trap hits the side of Terry as he walks to the truck.

Josie walks behind him.

Water spills from the fish, onto rocks.

Onto Terry.

Mack walks to an area littered with trees and weeds.

A lone, tall fishing pole sits on shore, wedged between two fat rocks.

Mack goes to it. Reels the line in.

She discovers a tiny fish caught on the hook.

A half-eaten worm dangles from its mouth.

She brings the fish into the palm of her hand.

It moves against the weight of her - makes its back fin spread into a fan.

Gently, Mack rubs the fin until it lowers, grips the fish.

She brings her face close, looks into its mouth.

MACK
You just had to swallow it, didn't you?

Mack places her thumb and index finger into the fish's mouth, searches for the hook.

After a few seconds, she finds it.

She moves her fingers back and forth inside the fish.

Its tiny body moves with every motion.

MACK
Got it.

Mack's fingers emerge from the fish's mouth with the hook and worm.

As she loosens her grip on it, she notices blood.

The fish doesn't move.

Mack brings the fish to the river's edge.

When she releases it into water, it floats on the surface.

As she watches the floating fish, drops of water fall into the river.

Slowly first, then with more intensity.

Rain's here.

Mack stands up, her face to the river.

We see the back of her as rain falls down on her skin.

The sound of Terry's wet footsteps coming towards her grows louder and louder.

Falling rain makes it hard to see.

3 INT./EXT. KITCHEN/FAMILY HOME - DAY **(THREE-YEAR-OLD MACK)** 3

Steam fills the interior of the kitchen, covers SOPHIA, Black, 34, Mack's mother, for a brief moment as water boils on the stove.

Sophia's naked, save for a pair of white underwear and a scar on her left breast.

Mack runs her hand along uneven, tiny hills of paint on the kitchen's wall as she walks towards Sophia, watches as she puts cornbread into the stove's hot mouth.

Sophia notices Mack.

SOPHIA
I'll be damned. You helping me cook?

Mack giggles - almost into herself.

SOPHIA
Come here, girl.

Sophia sits down at the faded kitchen table.

Steam drifts through the air.

Mack walks over to Sophia, notices the forest of hair peeking from Sophia's underwear.

Mack brings her finger to Sophia's pubic hair.

Sophia doesn't shift. She lets Mack explore.

SOPHIA
That's hair.

We watch as Mack touches Sophia's pubic hair with her fingertips.

A beat.

Mack pulls at Sophia's pubic hair, no longer interested in being gentle.

SOPHIA
Damn! Stop, Mack.

Sophia brings Mack into her arms, tickles her.

The glimpse of a gold tooth in her mouth as a train's horn sounds nearby, cutting air.

4 EXT. ROAD - DAY **(SEVEN-YEAR-OLD MACK)** 4

We see Mack's hand as she waves it behind her.

MACK (O.S.)
Stop.

She rides a bike with her friend, WOOD, Black, 9.

Wood wears a small afro and oversized sunglasses.

He avoids cars as he rides in the middle of the road.

They're in the downtown area of town.

Various people are on the sidewalks.

MACK
Can you do this?

We watch Mack as she rides a bit, pulls the bike up with her legs, hands.

She goes airborne for a few seconds.

Wood mockingly repeats her.

WOOD
Duh.

Mack rolls her eyes, speeds up.

MACK
Bet I can beat you back to my house.

Wood smacks his lips, waves his hand in the air, and speeds up, too.

They race down the road.

We hear the sound of their bikes' tires on pavement, wind.

As they turn down a neighborhood road, Mack looks beside her, at Wood. A smile on her face.

Her smile falls as she follows Wood's gaze - he's looking up at sky in front of them, his mouth open.

Mack looks, too.

We see smoke.

Deep, black curls of it.

Like black cracks in the sky.

Mack picks up her pace as she rides, Wood trails her.

5 EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD ROAD - DAY **(STILL SEVEN-YEAR-OLD MACK)** 5

Mack and Wood bike slowly down the road, stop in the middle of it.

Orange flames eat the sky.

A house is on fire.

Tall reeds surrounding the house bend left and right with smoke.

Various people run to and from the fire, buckets in hands, and attempt to douse the flames.

Terry is one of them. Sweat on his face.

Josie sits beside a thick tree with SEVERAL CHILDREN, Black, various ages.

They watch as flames come out of the home's windows.

Mack sees Josie, leaves her bike in the road and walks over to her, leans against the nearby tree.

Their patterned shirts almost match.

We stay with Mack for a long beat as she stares at the house.

Wood bikes over to Mack and Josie.

He stops a little ways behind them and the group of children, keeps his distance.

JOSIE
They look like eyes.

Mack looks down, sees the top of Josie's head.

We see a trail of scalp separating Josie's hair into two plaits.

JOSIE
The windows.

Mack's gaze finds the house again.

For the first time, we see Sophia standing in front of it.

She's beside a COUPLE, Black, 30s, the home's owners. Tears on their faces.

Sophia wears a modest, white shirt dress. A maid uniform.

One of her hands is wet.

Water from it drips into soil.

6 EXT. GARDEN/FAMILY HOME - DAY **(40-YEAR-OLD MACK)** 6

Terry's hands dig into dirt.

Deep.

Some dirt falls from under his nails, between his fingers.

His back makes an arch as he digs, his bald head glistens with sweat.

Sweat stains the spine of his shirt.

He stops a moment, catches his breath.

Behind him sits Mack, her eyes on Terry's hands.

MACK
Where's your shovel?

TERRY
All you need is your hands.

Terry thumps Mack's forehead with his thumb and index finger, leaves some dirt on her skin.

The corner of Mack's mouth turns up. She watches sweat fall down Terry's arm.

Terry digs into dirt again.

Beside where he digs, an earthworm is visible in soil.

Mack lifts the worm with a finger, moves it out of the way.

TERRY
There's a hungry fish somewhere.

MACK
Too many miles away for today.

Terry smiles slightly, his digging pace slows.

Mack notices the size of the hole he's digging.

MACK
How big you need?

TERRY
Not yet.

Mack watches Terry dig for another beat.

Then, she puts both her hands to soil and digs, too.

7 INT. MACK AND JOSIE'S BEDROOM/FAMILY HOME - NIGHT **(15-YEAR-OLD MACK)** 7

A window SCRAPS open.

It's Josie. Her hair down, in curls.

She climbs into the dark room from the window, tries not to make a sound.

MACK
It's like you want to get caught.

Josie's shoulders jump with surprise at Mack's voice.

She uses her hand to stop a scream or laughter from escaping her mouth, half covering the birthmark on her cheek.

Josie walks over to Mack's bed and sits on the floor beside it.

She rests her head against a wicker bed stand behind her.

MACK
You reek. You smoke again?

JOSIE
No. They was smoking, though.

Josie uses a hand to push Mack playfully on the bed.

JOSIE
Who gave me my first, huh?

Mack digs deeper into the covers on the bed, half covering her face and feigning innocence.

MACK
A dare is a dare.

Mack removes the covers from her face.

MACK
Where'd y'all go?

Josie lifts a hand in the air, tracing a map before her.

JOSIE
To get ice cream.

Josie's hand moves to the right, as if saying: "Here".

Her hand continues to move as she talks, tracing her night's journey.

JOSIE
Then down to the river.

A look passes between them.

Josie lets her hand fall back into her lap.

A beat.

A train's horn sounds distantly in the night.

JOSIE
That girl's still missing.

MACK
I know.

JOSIE
You ever wonder what it'd be like to just -

Josie makes a gesture with her hands, turns them into a cloud bursting, disappearing.

MACK
Yeah.

She stares at Mack for a long beat.

Mack doesn't say anything.

She watches as Josie gets up, walks to her own bed, begins to undress.

Josie stops in the act of taking off her dress, lets it fall again.

Turns.

JOSIE
I don't want the memories.

Josie pulls the dress over her head, walks over to a dresser in the room, opens drawers.

We stay with Mack on the bed. The sounds Josie makes in the room loud.

Mack looks to the ceiling, at brown rings of water marks there.

MACK
Me either.

The sounds of Josie moving in the room stop. Then -

We hear Josie's bare feet move around the floor.

We hear her bed creak when she enters it, too.

JOSIE (O.S.)
Rhonda.

MACK
What?

JOSIE (O.S.)
The missing girl. Her name's Rhonda.

Mack looks to Josie.

Josie looks to Mack.

They hold eye contact for a long beat.

The wind outside picking up.

8 EXT. POOL - DAY **(21-YEAR-OLD MACK)** 8

Mack, dressed in Army combat attire, is fully submerged underwater.

Legs and hands, bodies, drift around her, in Army combat attire, too.

It's water survival training.

Mack's eyes are open, still, as she watches her hands loose in the water.

9 INT. KITCHEN/FAMILY HOME - DAY **(11-YEAR-OLD MACK)** 9

Josie's hands are close to Mack's scalp, undoing braids.

Mack's head is bent to the side, her eyes closed.

Once the braids are loose, Josie's fingers untangle Mack's hair.

Slowly.

Slowly.

10 EXT. EMPTY PARKING LOT - NIGHT **(STILL 11-YEAR-OLD MACK)** 10

Loose braids drift in and out of frame.

Mack is jumping rope.

Bikes are scattered across the pavement of a store's parking lot.

Mack stops jumping rope, sits by her bike, catches her breath.

She looks out to two girls talking nearby: NIKKI, 12, and TIA, 13.

Mack spins a wheel of her bike, notices the back end of a flashlight sticking out of Nikki's front pocket.

MACK
What's that for?

Nikki motions to the trees. We see a triangle of light spilling out between them.

It breaks every now and again, as if people are moving through it.

Tia clears her throat.

The yellow shirt she wears is sparkly and wrinkled.

It glints with moonlight whenever she moves.

TIA
Nastiness.

MACK
What?

TIA
What you think they doing over there, Mackenzie?

We hear a car speeding on a nearby road.

MACK
Don't call me that.

Mack walks to Nikki and grabs the flashlight from her pants.

Nikki steps back as Mack walks away from her, a conflicting look of offense and admiration on her face.

Mack looks to Tia.

MACK
Show me.

We watch as both Mack and Tia walk into woods.

11 EXT. WOODS - NIGHT **(STILL 11-YEAR-OLD MACK)** 11

The girls walk over fallen tree limbs, leaves, debris.

When they reach the perimeter of light in the woods, they stop.

We see a BOY and GIRL, Black, teens, standing between trees, kissing.

Light from the flashlight is bright at their feet, knees.

Though the upper bodies of the kissing couple isn't lit with the flashlight, bits of their faces, shoulders, and arms are visible.

TIA
They really trying to be grown.

We stay here a beat as Mack and Tia take the scene in.

Mack heads back the way they came, but Tia grabs her hand.

TIA
You ever tried to kiss or whatever?

Mack shakes her head.

TIA
Not even with your hand?

MACK
Yeah. That, yeah.

A beat.

MACK
You kissed before?

Tia nods.

MACK
How was it?

A twig breaks in the distance.

Both girls look out into the darkness, listening for further sounds.

None come.

TIA
Boring.

Tia shrugs her shoulders as she walks deeper into woods - away from where the kissing kids were.

Tia falls into darkness.

We only see her again when Mack follows her.

They stop in front of each other.

Quiet.

Mack picks up a stick. Breaks it in her hands.

MACK
You wanna dare each other flashlight things?

Tia nods.

MACK
You get two. I get two.

TIA
Who first?

MACK
You.

Tia looks down at her feet for a few moments, thinks.

TIA
I dare you to touch my cheek with your tongue.

Mack leans towards Tia's face and ever so briefly touches her cheek with her tongue.

Tia makes an amused face.

TIA
Your turn.

MACK
Lick my knee.

Tia does Mack's dare, almost losing her balance in the act.

Silence falls between them after the task is done.

Tia points to the edge of the right side of her mouth.

TIA
Kiss me here. No tongue, though.

Mack leans in and barely kisses the side of Tia's mouth.

Wind moves through trees as Mack steps away from Tia.

When Mack's eyes find Tia's again, she points to the left edge of her own mouth.

Understanding, Tia leans in and kisses the edge of Mack's mouth, briefly.

And the dance begins:

Tia points to her elbow; Mack kisses it.

Mack points to her shoulder; Tia kisses it.

Tia point to the top of her hand; Mack kisses it.

Mack points to her temple; Tia kisses it.

We watch this litany of kisses between them as moonlight fades.

12 EXT. CUMBERLAND RIVER - DAY (**SEVEN-YEAR-OLD MACK**) 12

We see Mack's back at the mouth of the river again.

She's exactly where she was when she threw the small fish into water and it floated on the surface, dead.

As rain continues to fall, Terry's footsteps grow louder and louder behind her.

We hear him packing up the fishing pole, tackle box, bait.

Mack turns to him.

Looks.

Josie's no longer with him.

TERRY
Go help your mom. She's at the other spot.

Mack nods, walks onto a gravel and dirt road, goes deeper down it.

We stay with Mack for a beat as she walks, begins to run.

The rain picks up.

When, on her right, she sees a dirt path leading to water, she turns down it.

Wind pulls Mack sideways as she walks.

Leaves float towards the sky.

13 EXT. GROCERY STORE - DAY **(35-YEAR-OLD MACK)** 13

Car lights hit wet pavement.

Rain just stopped.

Mack's outside, on break, her hair in a braid to her shoulders.

A door closes in the distance.

Mack turns at the sound.

When she turns back, she sees Wood walking towards her from the parking lot.

He's dressed in an untucked plain white shirt and dark denim jeans.

We hear every wet footstep he takes as he walks towards her.

WOOD
Mackenzie, Mackenzie.

Mack stares at him without saying a word.

MACK
Wood.

He spreads his arms wide.

WOOD
It's your lucky day.

Mack laughs at Wood's comment as he closes the distance between them.

MACK
When you get in town?

They hug, briefly.

He looks at Mack for a long beat.

MACK
How's everyone? Your ma?

WOOD
Still up in everybody's business.

Mack gestures towards a couple of benches behind them.

MACK
You wanna sit?

WOOD
Can’t stay too long.

MACK
Okay.

WOOD
Wasn’t even sure you’d be here today.

MACK
I’m a manager now. It’s something.

WOOD
That’s great, Mack. I’m happy for you.

A beat.

MACK
Rita and the kids, they good? They gotta be getting up there.

WOOD
Four and six months.

Wood looks down.

WOOD
And you?

MACK
We’re good. Everyone’s good.

Wood rubs his hand over his mouth, nods.

They hold eye contact for a long beat.

A strange sound comes from the side of the building.

Mack and Wood turn.

Mack walks toward the sound.

Wood follows her.

When they round the building’s corner, they see two deer digging into scattered cans, a trash bin turned over.

The ears and heads of the deer jerk at the sound of their footsteps.

MACK
Be quiet. We'll scare them away.

Slowly, Mack grabs bread from a tossed, half-eaten sandwich.

Crouching down, she walks towards the deer, bread outstretched in her hand.

MACK
It's okay.

Eye contact.

Both of the deer look at her.

Mack keeps walking towards them.

A beat.

The deer run back into trees behind the store.

Mack's gaze follows them until she can't see them anymore.

We hear noises coming from behind Mack as she stands.

It's Wood picking up trash cans, putting litter back into them.

MACK
You don't have to do that.

Wood looks at Mack as he puts the last of the litter into its bin.

WOOD
Always telling me what I don't have to do.

Mack stays where she is, continues to stare at trees the deer ran into.

A beat.

Wood comes behind Mack, slowly. As if trying not to scare her off.

He puts his face to her neck. Inhales.

Wood's hands reach Mack's sides, stay there.

A long beat.

Wood drops his hands, turns.

Leaves.

Mack stands there, still, as Wood's footsteps fade.

Watching trees.

14 EXT. CUMBERLAND RIVER - DAY **(20-YEAR-OLD MACK)** 14

A train horn sounds in the air.

Mack sits behind Terry on a small motorboat, visibly pregnant.

Afternoon sun's almost turned into night.

They're the only ones on the water.

Fishing poles are laid beside their feet.

The contents of a tackle box shake and rattle with each hit of a wave.

A large brush fire is visible through woods on the side of the river.

Terry points to it.

Mack follows his hand, looks at the fire.

MACK
All that smoke.

Terry drops his hand.

As the boat passes the fire, we can almost hear the tree limbs, debris burning.

TERRY
Somewhere behind there. On the railroad tracks -

Terry points again.

Mack turns to the fire, looks beyond it.

Orange glints of light flicker on the water.

MACK
Somewhere, what?

TERRY
Every day, I'd walk home from school and there'd be white boys waiting on me. First, one. Then, three of 'em.

Waves from the boat spread out to the water's edge.

TERRY
They had big nails in socks in their hands.

Terry opens one of his hands fully, demonstrating the length of the nails.

TERRY
From the tracks.

Mack stares at the outline of Terry against red sky.

Sometimes, briefly, she can see the side of his face.

TERRY
I went down fighting, but *boy*, they beat my fucking ass. I stole a gun from where I knew my uncle kept it and brought it to school. Stuck it in a washer in the basement. Wrapped in a shirt. After school, I was ready. Waiting. Walking and looking.

Mack continues to stare at Terry.

For a few moments, he doesn't speak.

TERRY
On my way there, when them boys was just starting to come into view, an old preacher came up to me, saw that gun in my hand, and convinced me to walk the other way. He walked with me. Let me keep the gun with me. Didn't even ask for it.

Terry makes a soft gunshot sound with his mouth.

TERRY
I was this close.

Water hits Terry's arms, hands.

His shoulders low.

Orange light still touches some of his skin.

All of him quiet as he guides the boat to shore.

15 INT. KITCHEN/FAMILY HOME - DAY (**SEVEN-YEAR-OLD MACK**) 15

SOPHIA
Be still.

Mack sits on a wooden chair in the kitchen, her neck bent.

Sophia, standing, braids Mack's hair into a style.

Pain on her face, Mack jerks her shoulder to her ear.

We hear an audible HISS from her mouth.

16 INT. BATHROOM/FAMILY HOME - DAY - LATER (**STILL SEVEN-YEAR-OLD MACK**) 16

Sophia's red lips POP.

Mack sits on the toilet beside her, watching.

SOPHIA
You put your finger in your mouth -

Sophia puts her index finger in her mouth, brings her lips around it, makes an "O".

She takes her finger out of her mouth.

There's a ring of red lipstick around her index finger.

Sophia looks down at Mack, brings her face close.

SOPHIA
See?

Mack points to Sophia's mouth, almost touches her teeth.

Sophia grabs Mack's reaching hand, looks in the mirror.

SOPHIA
Got a good eye, Mackenzie.

Sophia wipes stray lipstick from her teeth, repeats the motion she just did by bringing her finger into her mouth again.

Sophia looks down at Mack.

No lipstick on her teeth this time.

17 INT. LIVING ROOM/FAMILY HOME - DAY - LATER **(STILL SEVEN-YEAR-OLD MACK)** 17

Mack's on her belly in the living room, a bulb out in the ceiling fan.

Adults in the room are engrossed in conversation, playing cards in their hands.

Empty drinks are on the table.

Three COUPLES, BLACK, 30s-40s, slowly dance in the room.

Close.

One Woman almost spills her drink as her partner spins her around.

Mack walks her fingers on the carpet. Turns them into legs.

She uses her knees to scoot closer to Sophia.

Mack stops at Sophia's bare feet - touches her toes.

Sophia's head doesn't turn.

MACK
Mama.

No answer. Louder now:

MACK
Mama.

Sophia looks down at Mack, a sweating cup in her hand.

SOPHIA
Don't speak until spoken to.

Sophia turns back to the conversation she was having.

Mack stares at Sophia's neck.

The mouths in the room.

Mack brings her hands into her lap.

Her fingers just fingers again.

18 EXT. BIVOUAC/FRONT YARD OF CHURCH - GERMANY - DAY **(21-YEAR-OLD MACK**) 18

The large CRUNCH of a boot entering hard snow on the ground.

Snow falls as Mack stands outside of a temporary camp in the front yard of a church.

JACOB, white, 30s, and Albert, Black, early 20s, are at the camp, too.

They're all in Army combat attire.

ALBERT
I need to piss. The pastor inside?

MACK
He's there.

Albert walks to the church, leaves footsteps in the snow with each step he takes.

We hear giggling and see TWO BOYS, white, 7, come towards the camp, something under each of their arms.

Their hands outstretched.

MACK
You two again.

One boy points to a stack of MREs (Meals, Ready to Eat) barely visible from outside of the tent.

Mack looks at the MREs, back to the Boys.

She gestures to what they're holding under their arms.

MACK
What's that?

The Boys shyly show her.

We don't see what they're holding.

Mack nods, goes inside of the tent, grabs three MREs.

She hands them to the Boys.

MREs in hand, they run off towards nearby houses.

JACOB
What happens when their parents notice them missing beers?

MACK
Guess you don’t want one?

Jacob doesn’t say anything, goes back inside of the tent.

We watch as snow continues to fall, lands on everything we can see.

Mack puts four beers deep into snow, packs it around them with her bare hands.

19 INT. LIVING ROOM/FAMILY HOME - DAY **(SEVEN-YEAR-OLD MACK)** 19

A wrinkled hand moves through thick, brown strands of hair.

After a few beats, the head the hair belongs to moves and we see Mack.

Her head’s on BETTY’s lap, Black, 76, Mack and Josie’s grandmother.

We stay with Mack’s face as Betty continues to stroke her hair.

Mack watches trees move with wind outside a window in front of her.

We see what she sees: brown tree limbs folding into each other. Stretching.

A beat.

The front door opens loudly and we’re back on Mack’s face again.

We hear footsteps come inside, the door close.

Betty’s hand stops in Mack’s hair.

BETTY
Terry.

The footsteps stop.

BETTY
She wanted to see you. Right when you got in.

Mack’s eyes look up at Terry, we hear his footsteps come forward.

After a beat, Terry's hand comes into frame, rubs Mack's cheek.

Mack's eyes stay looking up, at Terry.

TERRY
Missed you, too.

Terry's hand drops from Mack's cheek, leaves frame.

We hear him walk from the living room, go into the kitchen.

Betty's hand moves in Mack's hair again.

BETTY
Go on. Go back to sleep.

As Terry moves around the kitchen, Mack watches shadows of him light throws against the walls.

20 EXT. CUMBERLAND RIVER - DAY **(STILL SEVEN-YEAR-OLD MACK)** 20

Wind pushes Mack sideways as we see her walking on a dirt road again, to Sophia.

It's raining hard.

When, on her right, Mack sees a dirt path leading to where Sophia is fishing, she turns down it.

Mack rounds a corner full of brush, sees fishing poles high among rocks.

Leaves are littered everywhere. Pulled off branches by wind.

Mack heads towards the fishing poles, reaches for them.

Stops.

Rain pours down her face.

Her mouth open.

At the edge of the water, on rocks, is Sophia.

Still.

A gash is on her head from a rock beneath her.

Her face is half in, half out of water.

Sophia’s eyes are closed.

Mack, frozen, stares down at her.

The rain steady.

Mack moves her feet back from the water’s rippling arms, Sophia.

She moves her feet back again.

We stay with Mack standing still on rocks for a long beat.

Her eyes barely blink.

We hear Terry’s wet, running footsteps.

TERRY
Come on, y’all! It’s getting bad out.

Terry comes into frame.

TERRY
Sophia!

He runs to Sophia.

There.

On rocks.

Terry gets on his knees, checks if she’s breathing.

Terry lifts Sophia, puts her into his arms, brings her out into the road, towards the car.

His feet quick.

Mack follows.

Pushes limbs out of her face.

Mack watches as wet strands of Sophia’s hair drips water into dirt.

Mack stares at the back of Sophia’s head as she trails Terry.

Stares at Terry placing Sophia into the truck.

Josie cries loudly in the backseat, her screams everywhere.

Raindrops on the window hide details of Josie's face.

21 INT. BASKETBALL COURT/MILITARY BASE - DAY **(21-YEAR-OLD MACK)** 21

Mack plays basketball with several women soldiers.

After a beat, there's a physical play and a player throws the ball at Mack's back.

We don't see who threw the ball, but we see Mack react.

Other players on the court break the fight up.

22 EXT. STEPS OF GYM - DAY **(STILL 21-YEAR-OLD MACK)** 22

Mack sits on a step, out of breath.

Blood comes out of her nose.

Some drips down her chin.

23 EXT. DIRT ROAD - DAY **(17-YEAR-OLD MACK)** 23

Red dirt is kicked up by feet on a dirt road.

The feet belong to Mack and two teenage girls: EBONY and JAY, Black, 17.

They walk on either side of Mack.

Wood walks in front of them.

A long, white towel slinks from his hands, lightly touches dirt. Stains a corner of the towel red.

Mack notices.

Ebony and Jay notice, too.

EBONY
I see you looking at him.

Mack rolls her eyes, makes sure Ebony and Jay see the action.

MACK
I ain't looking at Wood.

Mack briskly walks faster than the girls at her side and arrives alongside Wood.

They walk side by side in silence for a few steps, steal glances at each other.

MACK
You need to get your girlfriends.

WOOD
You always think somebody thinking about somebody.

MACK
You don't know what I always do.

At that, Wood looks at Mack, something flickering over his face.

MACK
Your towel getting dirty.

Wood looks down, brings the towel to his face.

WOOD
You just now telling me?

MACK
I ain't your mama.

Ebony and Jay, walking behind them, "Oohhhhhh" loudly at this comment, clearly listening to the conversation.

24 EXT. CUMBERLAND RIVER - NIGHT **(STILL 17-YEAR-OLD MACK)** 24

Fireflies go on and off in the night.

Mack sits with Ebony and Jay inside of a tree, by water.

Crickets hiss.

They sit in silence for a few beats, lean against various parts of the tree.

EBONY
Fuck it.

Ebony jumps from the tree, lands, turns, yells:

EBONY
Who wants to be naked in the water with me?

Quickly, Ebony undresses as she runs to the water, throws her shirt, shorts into tall grass on either side of her.

She leaves her bathing suit on.

EBONY
Psych!

We hear laughing, talking as others join in, run into the water's dark folds.

Jay gets ready to jump from the tree, too.

JAY
(to Mack)
You coming?

Mack doesn't give an answer.

JAY
You want me to stay?

MACK
No. I'll catch up with y'all.

Jay nods, jumps, runs to the water.

Still in the tree, Mack stares out into the night for a while - at bodies moving, bobbing in flickering water.

She hears footsteps, looks down to the ground.

We see Wood again.

WOOD
What you still up there for?

MACK
Looking.

WOOD
Can get a better look down here.

MACK
You know I can't swim.

WOOD
That's why we all walked out here.
In this hot ass sun. To swim.

MACK
I know.

A beat.

Wood raises his hand to Mack.

WOOD
You want to learn?

Mack shakes her head “No.”

Wood drops his hand.

We hear it hit the side of his thigh.

WOOD
Mackenzie.

MACK
You still talking?

Wood doesn’t say anything, just keeps looking up at Mack.

MACK
I don’t like it.

Wood drops his head, looks down at his feet then back up into the tree.

Mack notices the way the bottom of his teeth stick out as he bites his lower lip.

MACK
Water.

Wood walks towards the tree, starts to climb up.

Mack shifts on the thick tree limb she sits on.

After a few beats, Wood makes it to her.

He sits near Mack, but not right beside her.

They look awkwardly at each other, in silence.

The sound of crickets grows loud, almost as if in a melody.

They look at each other again, really seeing the other.

WOOD
My dad just threw me in. Said that was the best way to learn.

MACK
What happened?

WOOD
I sank. Didn’t even know to kick.

MACK
You're here. Must have kicked some.

Wood shakes his head.

WOOD
No. He came in after me. I watched him the whole way. Breaking water. His eyes big. Coming towards me.

He turns toward Mack, laughs.

WOOD
That's how I learned. I was six, eight maybe. Watching my daddy swim after almost killing me. But I guess I saw what I needed to.

Mack smiles.

WOOD
His legs kicking water.

Mack plays with her hands in her lap, picks at a broken nail on her finger.

She looks at her feet hanging from the tree, floating above earth.

Mack looks to Wood.

MACK
You think I'd hurt myself if I jumped?

Wood looks down, back up to Mack, and down again.

WOOD
Definitely.

Still looking at Wood, Mack slowly leans forward.

WOOD
Mack.

She lets herself fall from the tree.

We watch Mack as she falls, her arms out beside her.

Drifting.

When she lands safely on the ground, she puts one open hand up to Wood.

He laughs from the tree above her.

WOOD
Fuck, no.

Wood slowly climbs down the tree instead.

25 EXT. DIRT ROAD - NIGHT **(STILL 17-YEAR-OLD MACK)** 25

Mack and Wood trail behind the group, walking back on the same dirt road they came in on.

Wood takes Mack's hand, brings her to him as he leans against a dim street lamp on the side of the road, moths circling it.

Mack lets him guide her.

Light from the street lamp a moon over his head.

WOOD
I'm sorry.

They look at each other for a couple of long beats.

MACK
For what?

WOOD
For it all.

Mack doesn't say anything.

She raises her index finger to Wood's neck, runs it across its length.

Mack looks at her finger, rubs it together with her thumb.

MACK
Sweating.

They stare at each other for a beat.

He lowers his head.

Mack raises hers to meet his.

Their kiss is tentative. Short.

Wood kisses Mack's neck.

She leans into it.

Wood pulls away from the kiss, looks at Mack.

He looks toward the group of teenagers still walking in front of them on the road, starting to disappear into darkness.

WOOD
Let's wait a bit.

MACK
Okay.

Wood walks Mack away from the road.

They lean against a thin tree out of view, kiss again.

Slow this time.

Hesitantly, Wood's hand moves to Mack's breasts, shorts, inside her swimsuit.

WOOD
You okay?

Mack nods.

His hand touches skin.

We stay with Mack as her breathing changes with the contact of his fingers.

Mack touches Wood's arms, his head to her neck.

She looks at the side of his ear against night sky as her breathing intensifies.

The sound of water, crickets constant in her ears.

Her feet dig into dirt.

26 EXT. - IRAQ - DAY **(27-YEAR-OLD MACK)** 26

The sound of LOUD HELICOPTER BLADES.

Debris and dirt from the ground flies into the air.

Mack, dressed in Army combat attire, watches the sky, it looks almost black.

Black Chinook helicopters are in the air.

Food, supplies, and trucks hang off the bottom of the helicopters.

It’s early morning.

Light attempts to break through sky behind the helicopters.

Troops watch the Chinooks’ ascent.

Mack covers her eyes, turns, as debris from the Chinooks moves in air around her.

27 INT. CAR - DAY (**SEVEN-YEAR-OLD MACK**) 27

The face of Betty.

She’s in the passenger seat of the car, turned to the backseat where Mack and Josie sit.

Her eyes are closed as she mouths words too low to hear.

Wrinkles are deep on her face. Her gray hair catches light.

Mack and Josie watch her eyes move under lids.

One of their hands in each of hers.

Betty is the only person praying in the car.

Betty opens her eyes, looks at Mack and Josie as she drops their hands.

Thick glasses rest on Betty’s nose. The window beside her half down.

Her hands shake a bit.

Mack watches a moth try to escape the car, fail. Its wings move nonstop.

Betty faces forward again.

We only see the side of her now.

Her head down.

Everyone in the car dressed in black.

BETTY
She’s gonna miss y’all.

Betty nods in her seat.

BETTY
(whispering)
She’s gonna miss y’all.

Betty’s hands move one over the other.

We see a figure move to the lowered window beside Betty.

Words are said too low to hear.

Mack watches the smudges of the window as they talk. The way the figure’s body blends in with them.

Betty turns to Mack and Josie.

BETTY
Go on with your daddy.

28 EXT. PARKING LOT - DAY **(STILL SEVEN-YEAR-OLD MACK)** 28

Mack and Josie walk behind Terry.

We’re on their eye level and see what they see: knees, hands, shoes, a squirrel crawling up a tree.

They arrive to their truck and Terry unlocks it.

TERRY
Y’all can get in back.

Terry lifts Mack and Josie onto the bed of the truck.

Closes and re-latches the door.

We hear him get in, turn the truck on.

He backs out and drives.

Mack puts her hands up as the truck’s tires kick up dirt.

29 EXT. PICKUP TRUCK - LATER **(STILL SEVEN-YEAR-OLD MACK)** 29

Josie is asleep in the bed of the truck.

Mack stares at her.

Their heads slightly bounce up and down with the movements of the truck on the road.

We hear the sound of gravel, tires running over rocks.

We stay with them like this.

Dried dirt from the bed of the truck rolls through their fingers.

Dusts their dresses.

Mack looks to the truck's window, sees the back of Terry's head through blurs of smudges.

His hand outside of the window.

Reaching.

A train horn sounds in the distance.

30 INT. CHURCH - DAY **(23-YEAR-OLD MACK)** 30

Fragments of bodies dance slowly on a dance floor.

Everyone is in formal attire. The room smoky.

After a few beats, we only see Josie and WAYNE, Black, 32, heavyset, dancing.

Josie wears a white knee-length dress. Its sleeves long.

Wayne wears gray slacks and a white pressed dress shirt.

The top few buttons of his shirt are open. His jacket somewhere else.

Mack sits in a chair, watching, her hands in her lap.

No one else is at the table.

Mack looks to Terry. He talks with an OLDER WOMAN, Black, 60s, at the edge of the dance floor.

A beat.

Mack looks back to Josie and Wayne as they dance.

Josie's cheek is on Wayne's shoulder.

We see the back of a YOUNG GIRL, Black, 3, as she walks through the crowd.

31 INT. GROCERY STORE - NIGHT **(20-YEAR-OLD MACK)** 31

Bright fluorescent lights.

Mack, noticeably pregnant, walks through the aisles of a grocery store, a cart in front of her.

She picks up items as she walks.

As she heads to the register, she sees Wood walk into the store.

He laughs with a WOMAN, Black, late teens, her hair in a ponytail.

Mack stares at Wood and the Woman as she continues to walk.

Wood doesn't see her.

32 EXT. WOOD'S HOME - DAY **(STILL 20-YEAR-OLD MACK)** 32

LOUD TORNADO SIRENS.

Mack leans against the side of a brick house.

Wind rushes through trees, lifts hair into Mack's face.

Mack looks beside her and we see NEICY, BLACK, 42, sitting in a patterned green chair beside the home's front door, watching Mack.

They hold eye contact for a long beat.

Several stains from weather, dirt, mark the chair's green.

NEICY
I think it'll pass.

Mack looks to the sky, at dark clouds.

NEICY
Never know, though.

Mack looks back to Neicy. Her hands tap the brick behind her.

MACK
I wanted to be there when he told you.

NEICY
Wood can't keep nothing from me.

We hear the SCREECHING of a screen door and Wood appears.

WOOD
It's ready, Ma.

We hear SCREECHING again as Wood goes back into the house, the screen door closing.

Neicy adjusts herself in her chair.

NEICY
Not his way.

Neicy stands up, looks around at the trees, points to one.

NEICY
When he was a little thing, he threw a toy up there and it got stuck. He missed that toy. Bad. I told him, “Cry now, but you going to be crying worse when your kids pay you back for this. They gonna have some good arms.”

Neicy laughs quietly.

NEICY
Not two weeks ago, that toy fell back.

A beat.

NEICY
Maybe it’s been there. Where those stray cats be.

Neicy looks at an area of land beyond the house.

NEICY
No face. But I recognized it like I saw it yesterday.

A gust of wind passes, causing some debris to roll across the road.

The TORNADO SIRENS still sound.

Neicy heads to the door, opens it, the door’s handle in her hand.

She pauses.

NEICY
Whenever you see that child -

Neicy turns to Mack.

NEICY
It ain’t gonna be easy. Be ready for that.

Mack bites her lips, nods.

MACK
Yes, ma'am.

Neicy looks at Mack again then heads inside the house.

Mack takes one more look at the tree Neicy spoke of, then heads inside the house, too.

33 INT. BATHROOM/WOOD’S HOME - DAY **(STILL 20-YEAR-OLD MACK)** 33

Mack and Neicy lie down side by side inside a bathtub.

Their heads at either end.

We still hear the SIRENS outside.

Branches from nearby trees scratch windows, the roof.

They both look forward, at each other, as SIRENS sing outside.

A beat.

MACK
Where’s Wood?

WOOD (O.S.)
(yelling)
In the closet!

Mack smiles at that, the sound of wind fading.

34 EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD ROAD - NIGHT - LATER **(STILL 20-YEAR-OLD MACK)** 34

Mack and Wood dance slowly down a neighborhood road.

Close.

Long Branches from trees are everywhere.

Blown off trees by wind.

All of a sudden, Mack and Wood move fast, quick, swinging wide.

They laugh.

Wood touches Mack's arm with his fingers.

WOOD
How'd you get this?

Mack moves her head to Wood's shoulder as their dancing slows.

Wood's thumb touches a small scar on Mack's wrist.

The scar's in the shape of a half-drawn circle. Open.

Mack and Wood move slow again, in the middle of the road.

Debris by their feet.

MACK
A scratch. From my sister.

WOOD
Long ass nails.

Mack looks around, past the road.

The tornado hasn't done much visible damage.

MACK
It's so quiet. Like we should be whispering.

Mack turns her head on Wood's shoulder, looks up at him.

He looks at her, too.

WOOD
If we wanted to, we could, Mack. All of it.

MACK
I can't, Wood.

Wood doesn't say anything else.

They keep moving in the road.

Slowly.

The pavement wet.

Mack and Wood's dancing slows down to a stop.

WOOD
I should get back. You okay to walk the rest of the way home?

Mack nods.

Wood turns, walks back the way they came.

MACK
Wood.

Wood turns, looks at Mack.

MACK
Thank you.

Wood nods subtly, turns back, continues to walk.

A flickering street light catches him as he passes.

Once Wood is further out, Mack sits down in the middle of the road, her knees to her chest.

Mack watches Wood walk until she can't see him anymore.

35 INT. KITCHEN/FAMILY HOME - DAY (**SEVEN-YEAR-OLD MACK**) 35

Sophia's finger traces a line across the head of a dying catfish.

The fish sits on wet, bloody newspapers.

It's bottom lip barely moves.

SOPHIA
You cut here first.

Mack traces the fish with her finger exactly the way Sophia did.

SOPHIA
Just like that.

Mack grabs a small knife sitting on the table.

SOPHIA
Stand up for this. To get a good grip.

Mack stands up from her chair.

Knife in hand, Mack looks to Sophia.

SOPHIA
Go on.

Mack brings the knife to the back of the fish's head, cuts.

Deeper.

We watch as blood spills onto newspapers, covers the table, Mack's hands.

36 EXT. BRIDGE/CUMBERLAND RIVER - DAY **(60-YEAR-OLD MACK)** 36

Mack looks out to a red and white lure sitting on the river's surface

She stands on the side of a bridge, a fishing pole in her hands.

The sun's just begun to come out from behind shedding trees.

After a few moments of silence, there's a bite on Mack's hook.

Carefully, Mack decides when to reel in.

When to keep the line still.

We see the fish on the surface of the water as Mack reels it to shore, brings it into her hands.

It's a medium-sized catfish.

Its whiskers black, wet.

Holding the fish in one hand, and gripping the hook in the other, Mack pulls the hook out of its lip.

The fish flaps against Mack's hand as she brings it down towards the water, pulls a dark trap to the surface.

Two other fish - brims - swim inside of the trap.

Mack pushes the catfish into the trap, closes the top again.

She places the trap back into water.

Mack watches the trap, the fish, disappear beneath the water's dark ripples.

A rope beneath a rock ensures the trap doesn't float away.

Still kneeling, Mack brings her hands into water. Rinses them.

She looks at dirt beneath her nails.

She can almost see her reflection in the water.

Mack stands up, shakes her hands loose of remaining drops.

Wind blows hard.

It’s about to rain. Storm.

Mack looks at the river.

She glances around.

A beat.

Mack takes off her shoes, socks.

She takes off her pants, brings her shirt above her head.

She folds the articles of clothing she took off, puts them beside her.

Mack brings her bare toes to the edge of the river.

We stay with her for a long beat as she watches water almost touch her toes.

Mack takes a step.

Two.

Slowly, slowly, she enters the water.

Ripples surround her as she walks further into the water.

Mack goes shoulders deep, closes her eyes.

Exhales.

We stay with Mack like this for a long beat.

A hit of thunder sounds in the sky.

37 INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY **(20-YEAR-OLD MACK)** 37

Mack holds LILY, Black, newborn, in her arms, a head full of soft hair on her head.

They're the only two in the hospital room.

Lily's swaddled in a pink blanket. A crooked bow on her head.

Mack puts her lips to Lily's forehead. Hospital bracelets move on her wrist as she does.

Lily cries.

MACK
I know. I know.

Mack kisses Lily's head again.

Touches Lily's eyebrows, mouth.

Mack stares at Lily for a long beat, puts her ear to her body.

Listens.

Mack closes her eyes as she keeps her ear to Lily's stomach.

MACK
What was that? You're gonna be a singer?

Mack's eyes are still closed.

She's smiling now.

MACK
An athlete, too? That's my girl.

The door of the room opens and a NURSE, 30s, Latina, enters.

After a beat, we see Josie standing behind her.

NURSE
Ma'am.

Mack nods.

The Nurse steps aside and lets Josie enter the room.

Mack looks down at Lily in her arms as Josie nears.

We hear the soft CLICK of the door closing again.

Josie sits on the side of the bed. We can hear her breathing.

JOSIE
It’s just me. I told Wayne just you and me today.

A beat.

JOSIE
And this little one.

MACK
Lily.

Josie doesn’t say anything, her eyes fixed on Lily.

MACK
Her name.

JOSIE
What?

MACK
That one thing.

Josie nods, her bottom lip in her teeth.

JOSIE
Of course. Lily.

Mack looks down to Lily, brings her close, whispers into her ear.

Josie watches them, quiet.

A beat.

JOSIE
Wood?

Mack looks to Josie, still whispering in Lily’s ear.

She doesn’t respond to the question.

Lily’s hand is high in the air, reaching towards fluorescent lights in the ceiling.

Mack lifts her face from Lily’s ear.

MACK
Out of town. I told him.

A beat.

Slowly, Mack hands Lily to Josie.

Josie's eyes light up as she looks down at Lily, takes her in her arms.

Her hands shake.

JOSIE
Hi, little baby. You made it.

Josie moves her hand to Mack's as she holds Lily.

Squeezes.

Mack watches Lily, her thick head of hair.

Mack doesn't mean to cry.

Some tears fall anyway.

A couple of tears drop from Josie's eyes, too, onto Lily.

Mack smooths the tears into Lily's skin.

38 EXT. FIELD - DAY **(11-YEAR-OLD MACK)** 38

Mack lies in a field of grass. Her eyes to the sky.

We see what she's looking at: clouds moving in a sea of bluish-gray.

Their edges touching, breaking away.

Mack's fingers move in the grass, grip a yellow blade.

Her head moves at the sound of thunder hitting air.

39 EXT./INT. DOOR TO PARENTS' BEDROOM/FAMILY HOME - DAY - LATER **(STILL 11-YEAR-OLD MACK)** 39

Mack's eye is at the cracked opening of a door.

She watches as Terry sits on his bed, a towel loose around his waist.

Light pours onto his skin like water.

Mack stares at him, sees a cross tattoo on the side of his arm, hair on his belly.

His eyes are closed as he whispers to himself.

Mack only picks up a word or two.

TERRY
- was you there.

She watches as his eyes move under lids.

A beat.

Terry opens his eyes and stands.

He goes to a dresser in the corner of the room, opens it, drops his towel.

We see bare thighs, legs, the side of his penis.

He pulls clothes from the dresser's drawers.

He rubs stubble on his face.

Mack watches Terry move.

He turns.

Eye contact.

Mack breathes heavily, caught.

She runs.

We hear the sound of her footsteps heavy in the hallway, then --

The SLAM of a door.

40 EXT. BACKYARD/FAMILY HOME - DAY - LATER **(STILL 11-YEAR-OLD MACK)** 40

Blades of grass sprout from dirt like antlers as Terry leans against a tree in the front yard of home - looks at passing cars.

Mack watches him from the backyard.

His back to her.

41 EXT. CUMBERLAND RIVER - DAY **(50-YEAR-OLD MACK)** 41

We see the back of Lily as she walks deeper into woods, a ponytail at the nape of her neck.

Lily wears a white tank top, a bathing suit peeks from beneath it. A dark scar is on her back.

It's foggy out. The sound of water nearby.

Lily looks to Mack and Josie, who walk behind her.

LILY
It's the warmest it's been all year.

They continue to walk in silence.

LILY
The water.

We hear their wet footsteps on mud.

They reach the mouth of the river, pause as they look out at the water.

Fog drifts like arms in the air.

Light comes through trees.

LILY
See? Just us.

JOSIE
Still not sure if "just us" was worth getting up at 4 a.m.

Lily laughs at that, looks at Mack.

LILY
How you feeling, Auntie?

MACK
Like I got up early to go fishing.

Mack takes her eyes from the water, looks at Lily.

MACK
It's never stuck.

LILY
Maybe today it will.

Lily smiles at Mack.

LILY
Y'all get undressed. Nobody's looking.

Lily enters the water as Mack and Josie undress.

Lily's black bathing suit glistens as water reaches it.

MACK
Lily looks like she's returning somewhere.

JOSIE
She always looks like that.

Mack and Josie stand on the brink of the river.

Mack wears a black, one-piece swimsuit.

Josie's suit is a dark red bikini.

MACK
Okay, Josie.

JOSIE
We're still here, ain't we?

Josie takes Mack's hand and they walk to the water, stopping right at the edge of wet.

A beat.

Lily watches them as they enter the water, her hands out.

As Mack and Josie walk to Lily, the water reaches their knees.

Hips.

Lily walks a few steps towards them.

LILY
Bend your knees. Let the water hit your chest.

The women lower themselves into the water, let it come to their chest, neck.

They all drift together in a loose circle.

JOSIE
The warmest?

They laugh at Josie's comment, sit in the water in silence as fog moves around them.

A carp pops the surface of water in the distance.

A beat.

MACK
A Cardinal.

Lily and Josie look at Mack.

MACK
There.

Mack lifts her arm, points to a tree in the distance.

Water falls from her skin as her arm reaches out.

We stay with Mack as she points, the Cardinal she speaks of off screen.

Josie, Mack, and Lily look over to the Cardinal. After a beat, they close their eyes.

One after the other.

Mack's lips move slightly, mouthing words.

Mack opens her eyes, blows a kiss to the bird.

Josie and Lily open their eyes and do the same.

Fog moves around them all.

LILY
I hope y'all wished for the ability to swim.

42 EXT. CUMBERLAND RIVER - DAY - LATER (**STILL 50-YEAR-OLD MACK**) 42

Josie gets out of the river in the background.

Mack and Lily stay behind, water to their hips.

LILY
Here.

Mack looks at Lily's hands, just visible under the surface of the water, reaching towards her.

Lily takes a couple of steps to Mack.

LILY
Lie down on my hands.

We see the palms of Lily's hands in the water again.

Mack bends down, leans back, lands on Lily's hands.

She floats.

Mack looks up at Lily, sees her face and sky.

A beat.

Lily's face leaves frame and we don't see her anymore.

Mack stays drifting in the river, floats.

Her eyes to sky.

No more fog in the air.

43 INT. KITCHEN/FAMILY HOME - DAY **(29-YEAR-OLD MACK)** 43

Newspapers sit wet under a pile of fish.

Mack, Josie, Lily, and Terry sit at the kitchen table.

Only Terry and Lily are gutting fish.

A cane hangs from the back of Terry's chair, unused.

Mack and Josie sit at the other end of the table, watching.

Bright burettes in the shape of boats swing from Lily's hair. It's separated into several plaits.

Lily holds a spoon in her hand. A small brim is in front of her, its belly cut.

Mack watches as Lily inserts the spoon into the fish's belly, takes out its guts.

Terry readies another small fish for Lily by using a knife to cut its belly open before handing it to her.

When Lily is ready for it, he places the fish in front of her.

TERRY
(conspiratorially)
We're doing all the work today.

Lily looks up at Terry, nods seriously.

Lily returns her attention to the fish, scoops out its eyes.

JOSIE
No catfish in the water?

TERRY
Too much sun.

Mack watches Lily.

MACK
I used to do that, too.

Lily looks at Mack, back down to the fish.

The spoon in Lily’s hand no longer guts the fish.

Now, she’s using it to scrape off the fish’s scales.

TERRY
Good technique, Lily.

MACK
(to Lily)
How many you catch today?

Terry watches Mack and Lily.

Lily holds up three fingers, bits of fish on them.

Terry laughs.

TERRY
Three? Which one of y’all been teaching her how to lie?

Terry looks to Mack and Josie.

No one says anything.

LILY
Grandaddy said a catfish can live long.

JOSIE
How long?

Lily flashes all ten of her fingers a multitude of times.

LILY
60.

MACK
60, what?

LILY
Years.

TERRY
That’s right.

Lily places the spoon in her hand on the table.

LILY
Any more?

TERRY
That’s all for now, Lily. Let’s wash our hands. These two can get the grease going.

Terry looks to Mack and Josie as he guides Lily out of the kitchen.

He thumps Lily’s forehead softly with his index finger and thumb as they leave.

Limbs of trees tap at the window.

44 INT. BATHROOM/FAMILY HOME - DAY **(FIVE-YEAR-OLD MACK)** 44

Mack’s hands play with a Black plastic doll with one arm underwater.

We see her face as she plays with the doll, her cheeks heavy with breath she’s holding underwater.

Mack’s eyes are barely open.

Bubbles come from her nose.

Two hands enter the water, grab Mack’s shoulders, pull her up.

When Mack breaks surface, her hands go to her face, wipe water from her eyes, nose, mouth.

We hear the sound of rain falling outside.

SOPHIA
You wanna drown? I’ll find a puddle to throw you in once this rain stops.

MACK
Nooooo!

Josie sits in the bathtub, too, laughs, several baby teeth gone in her mouth.

Sophia re-wets a rag, washes Mack's back.

As she does, Mack flattens bubbles floating in the water in front of her by clapping her hands together.

Rain picks up outside, hits the roof rhythmically, like hoofbeats.

Mack stops clapping, looks up to the ceiling as it hits.

45 INT. PICKUP TRUCK - DAY (**SEVEN-YEAR-OLD MACK**) 45

Josie SCREAMS in the backseat of the pickup truck as Terry speeds down the dirt road, mud flying.

Sophia's unmoving in the front seat.

Her head's on Terry's shoulder.

With each jump in the road, Sophia's head moves.

Sometimes, Mack can see the side of Sophia's face, dried blood on her face.

Mack reaches out her fingers, almost touches Terry's shoulder, the wet his sweat and rain left on the seat.

46 INT. MACK'S BEDROOM/MACK'S HOUSE - NIGHT (**29-YEAR-OLD MACK**) 46

We're behind Mack as she walks around her room in her underwear.

The room is sparse, bare.

A song blares loudly out of a radio.

Mack dances to it, moves her legs, arms.

Sweat glistens on her face.

After several long beats of dancing, Mack slowly stops, turns off the radio.

She goes to the room's doorway, leans against its frame.

Mack wipes her eyes with the back of her hand, breathes heavily.

A long beat.

MACK
Happy birthday to you. Happy birthday to you.

Mack walks out of the room. The singing done.

We stay looking into it.

At its empty doorway.

47 INT. KITCHEN/JOSIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT **(20-YEAR-OLD MACK)** 47

We hear the sound of eating utensils hitting plates.

Mack sits at a table with Josie and Wayne.

She puts a forkful of greens in her mouth

No one speaks at the table.

Wayne puts his fork down, stares at Mack.

He looks as if he wants to say something, doesn't.

A train sings in the distance.

48 EXT. PORCH/JOSIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT **(STILL 20-YEAR-OLD MACK)** 48

Josie and Mack sit on the home's back porch.

We see the back of them.

The porch light is on, but it flickers off every now and again.

Mack runs a finger along the porch's peeling surface.

Mack's heavily pregnant.

The loose dress she wears reaches her ankles.

We hear footsteps come from inside the house behind them.

A shadow stretches out on the porch.

It's Wayne's.

He briefly stands in the doorway of the kitchen, in front of the screen door leading out to the porch. Half of his face in shadow.

He retreats back into the orange-yellow light of the home.

The sound of his footsteps fade.

Josie looks to Mack, her profile illuminated by light coming from the house.

JOSIE
I keep thinking about Frankie. When he almost ran me over in Grandma's driveway.

MACK
Grandma just about killed him for that.

JOSIE
(imitating Betty)
"Get!" She said. "Get!"

They both laugh, look into the night for a long beat.

Wind picks up and we hear leaves shaking in the distance, the screen door hit its frame.

MACK
It's not like you think.

Josie looks at Mack, doesn't say anything.

MACK
Sometimes, I don't think you really heard me.

Mack's hands are at her knees now, drifting inside her dress.

MACK
(almost whispering)
I always knew she was yours.

Mack's eyes scan the darkness.

MACK
Even when I didn't.

Mack looks at Josie now.

Eye contact.

MACK
It's got nothing to do with anything besides the fact that I - I thought I could, but I can't. And...I know you can. And she'd be good with you, Josie. I know that.

Mack looks into the night, her eyes reflecting moonlight.

The hiss of crickets picks up around them.

Josie looks to Mack.

JOSIE
And who would she be to you, Mack?

Josie puts her hand to her chest.

JOSIE
You know I'd raise her like my own. But who would she be to you?

Mack stares at Josie.

MACK
My sister's child.

A long beat.

MACK
I be in bed talking to her.

Josie takes a long inhale and exhale, nods at Mack's words.

JOSIE
What's she say?

MACK
Everything. Sounding just like Mama.

A beat.

JOSIE
Mama.

Josie looks to Mack, says it again, slower:

JOSIE
Mama.

Mack and Josie mouth the word together. No sound exits their lips.

Eye contact.

For a second, their shared breaths sound like the wind.

49 EXT. ROAD - DAY **(FIVE-YEAR-OLD MACK)** 49

Hand in hand, Sophia and Mack walk on a road of dirt and gravel.

To the right of them is a large corn field.

They walk deep into the field of corn, disappear somewhere between the tall stalks.

50 EXT. FIELD - DAY **(STILL FIVE-YEAR-OLD MACK)** 50

Mack's hands tear at the green skin of a stalk of corn.

A little ways behind Mack, Sophia squats between two stalks.

The bottom of her dress is to her thighs, her panties scrunched in one hand.

Sophia pees.

Insects are the only sounds heard around them.

Sophia finishes, wiggles a bit, puts her panties back on.

Mack continues to pull at, scratch the stalk of corn. Green bits of it under her nails.

Mack turns from the stalk of corn in front of her, watches as Sophia wipes her upper lip and forehead with the back of her hand and uses her feet to cover up the wetness left in the dirt.

51 INT. MACK'S BEDROOM/MACK'S HOUSE - DAY **(55-YEAR-OLD MACK)** 51

It's raining. Hard.

Mack looks outside a barely open window, glances at a white wall beside it.

A large shadow moves over the wall.

We stay with the shadow for a long beat.

Briefly, the shadow slows, looks like a silhouette.

Sparks of light dance on the wall, moves across Mack's face as she looks.

A MAN'S HAND, Black, 60s, comes up from the bed, into frame, and grazes Mack's back.

52 INT. BEDROOM/FAMILY HOME - NIGHT (**SEVEN-YEAR-OLD MACK**) 52

Mack's hands put lotion on Sophia's back.

Sophia turns her head and we see her profile.

Her eyes open, looking, somewhere else.

53 INT. LIVING ROOM/FAMILY HOME - DAY (**STILL SEVEN-YEAR-OLD MACK**) 53

It's raining outside.

Terry holds Mack in his arms as she slowly wakes from sleep.

Her eyes drift to his neck, chin. Then -

She watches the shadows of both of them move on the wall.

We stay with them like this for a long beat.

Mack's hands find the back of Terry's neck.

And rest there.

54 EXT. JOSIE'S HOUSE - DAY (**31-YEAR-OLD MACK**) 54

We see the backs of Mack and Lily.

They sit on the back porch of Josie's home as rain hits.

Inside the house, Josie moves around the kitchen. Sometimes, we can hear her steps.

Drops of rain land on Mack and Josie's skin every now and again.

Lily watches Mack as they listen to the rain.

LILY
You always outside when it rains.

Mack nods as she turns her head to Lily.

The rain picks up.

MACK
How's school?

Lily scrunches up her nose.

LILY
I don't want to talk about school.

MACK
Of course not.

LILY
I'm good at the math, though.

Lily covertly looks behind her, into the house, at Josie.

LILY
Mama isn't.

Lily hides a smile behind her hand, looks at Mack.

Mack smiles back at Lily.

A beat.

Lily inhales quickly, points her finger.

Mack's gaze follows Lily's finger and she sees a bright red Cardinal on the porch.

The Cardinal stays still on the porch as rain hits everything we can see.

MACK
You know what that is?

LILY
A bird.

MACK
What kind of bird?

LILY
A red one.

MACK
A Cardinal.

Lily stares at the bird, takes it in.

MACK
You know what you do when you see a Cardinal?

Lily shakes her head.

MACK
You make a wish.

LILY
Who decided that?

MACK
She didn't decide it, but she's the one who told me. Your grandmother.

LILY
I never met her.

MACK
I know.

LILY
I've seen pictures. I like how she had a gold tooth.

Lily puts her tongue to one of her front teeth.

The Cardinal is a little closer now.

Mack and Lily look to it again.

MACK
You've gotta close your eyes when you make the wish.

LILY
Why?

A beat.

MACK
That's just how my mama told me.

Lily nods.

MACK
And -

LILY
There's more?

MACK
After you've thought of your wish,
you blow the Cardinal a kiss.

Mack watches Lily as she sits up straight on the porch, looks at the Cardinal.

Lily closes her eyes, whispers to herself.

A beat.

Lily opens her eyes, blows the Cardinal a kiss.

She smiles at Mack.

LILY
Don't you have a wish?

Mack turns her body slightly, looks at the Cardinal, closes her eyes.

A beat.

Mack opens her eyes and looks at the Cardinal again, blows it a kiss.

LILY
Good.

Lily claps her hands and the bird flies away.

Mack watches as Lily stands and attempts to catch drops of rain into her mouth from the edge of the porch.

Lily's hands circle her mouth like a funnel. Wind blows hair into her eyes.

Mack stands, leans towards Lily.

MACK
Over here is better.

Mack takes a few steps off the porch, into the backyard.

Into the rain.

Lily looks back into the house, where Josie was.

MACK
She won't be mad if you get a
little rain on you.

Lily walks to Mack.

Mack and Lily open their mouths, turn towards falling raindrops coming from the sky.

Water falls down both of their chins.

END